



Writing a Position Paper

A position paper presents an arguable opinion about an issue. The goal of a position paper is to convince the audience that your opinion is valid and worth listening to. Ideas that you are considering need to be carefully examined in introducing the topic, developing your argument, and organizing your paper. It is very important to ensure that you are addressing all sides of the issue and presenting it in a manner that is easy for your audience to understand. Your job is to take one side of the argument and persuade your audience that you have well-founded knowledge of the topic being presented. It is important to support your argument with evidence to ensure the validity of your claims, as well as to address the counterclaims to show that you are well informed about both sides.

Analyzing the Issue and Developing an Argument

You must do some research on the subject matter. While you may already have an opinion on the topic and an idea about which side of the argument you want to take, you need to ensure that your position is well supported. Listing out the pro and con sides of the topic will help you examine your ability to support your counterclaims, along with a list of supporting evidence for both sides. Supporting evidence includes the following:

- ☐ Factual Knowledge - Information that is verifiable and agreed upon by almost everyone
- ☐ Statistical Inferences - Interpretation and examples of an accumulation of facts
- ☐ Informed Opinion - Opinion developed through research and/or expertise of the claim
- ☐ Personal Testimony - Personal experience related by a knowledgeable party

Once you have made your pro and con lists, compare the information side by side. Considering your audience, as well as your own viewpoint, choose the position you will take.

In considering the audience, ask yourself the following questions:

- ☐ Who is your audience? (assume your audience knows nothing about the topic)
- ☐ What do they believe?
- ☐ Where might they stand on the issue?
- ☐ How are their interests involved?
- ☐ What evidence is likely to be effective with them?

In determining your viewpoint, ask yourself the following:

- ☐ How do you feel about the topic?
- ☐ Can you assert an argument for your position on the topic which will result in a reasonable (supportable) outcome?
- ☐ Do you have enough material to support your opinion?

Organization

Your introduction should lead up to a thesis that organizes the rest of your paper. There are three advantages to leading with the thesis:

1. The audience knows where you stand.
2. The thesis is located in the two strongest places, first and last.
3. It is the most common form of academic argument used.

Sample outline for a position paper:

1. Introduction

- A. Introduce the topic
- B. Provide background on the topic
- C. Assert the thesis (your view of the issue)

2. Counter Argument

(it always helps your argument to look at the argument the other side will give)

- A. Summarize the arguments against your position
- B. Provide supporting information for those arguments
- C. Rebut those arguments

3. Your Argument

- A. Assert point #1 of your position
 - 1. Give your opinion
 - 2. Provide support
- B. Assert point #2 of your position
 - 1. Give your opinion
 - 2. Provide support
- C. Assert point #3 of your position (if you have a third point)
 - 1. Give your opinion
 - 2. Provide support

4. Conclusion

- A. Restate your argument
- B. Indicate what the result should be